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WILD MIKE

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Florence L Montgomery

WILD MIKE

AND HIS VICTIM

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'MISUNDERSTOOD'

LONDON
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON
NEW BURLINGTON STREET
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty
1875

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TO

HARVIE FARQUHAR, ESQ.

TREASURER OF THE VICTORIA HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN

GOUGH HOUSE, CHELSEA

THE FOLLOWING STORY

IS

DEDICATED

212

PREFACE.

—•—

The following story is not a continuation of the 'Town Crier Series,' nor is it intended for children.

F. C.

August, 1875.

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

LISTENING FOR A STEP UPON THE STAIR

CHAPTER I.

All through the long winter of 1874–5 has little Tim Collins been laid up in an attic of one of the crowded houses in the poorer parts of Brompton.

Such a long winter it has been! Never, the doctors tell us, has there been so much illness about.

Never, within our own memory, has the list of deaths in the *Times* been so long.

Wonderful the havoc that has been made among the very old and the very young.

And if it has been like this with the rich, what must have it have been with the poor? Especially with the children.

In the warm, luxurious nurseries of the rich it has been difficult enough to keep out the cold draughts of air that would find their way in everywhere.

Every sort of device that ingenuity could contrive to keep out the bitter wind has been tried and failed.

Sand-bags, cotton-wool, list, curtains over the doors; one and all have been insufficient.

Yet, with all this care, and in spite of being kept in-doors day after day, the children have caught cold, and some have been in bed and had the doctor.

Then what pains and attention have been bestowed upon them! What toys their fathers have brought home to them to prevent their being dull!

How their mothers have sat by their bedsides day after day, reading them fairy-tales, telling them stories, and showing them pictures.

Their nurses have dressed dolls and made

paper-boats all day long, and been up and down half-a-dozen times in the night to give them lozenges or make them orange-ade.

It has been like this with the sick children of the rich, but how has it been with the sick children of the poor?

This is the question little Tim shall answer; this is the story I am going to tell.

He knows, and he shall tell you what it is to be ill in that noisy, crowded garret, which he and his mother share with a drunken Irish-woman and her family of five wild, rough children.

We will lift the veil which in this great metropolis hangs between us and our poor neighbours, and hides from our view what is going on so near.

And behind it we shall see the sick child lying, as he lies day after day.

His father is dead, and his mother cannot stay with him to take care of him; for on her

earnings all depends. From morning till night she is away at the steam-laundry, toiling to make enough to keep herself alive, and to provide for her sick boy a few of the many things of which he stands so sorely in need.

So all day long he lies there, quiet and lonely; too weak to move, too patient to complain, and too brave to cry.

Quiet and lonely did I say?

Yes; lonely always, but quiet only sometimes. For there are times in the day when the Irish children rush in from school, and their mother returns from her charing. Then the babies cry, the big ones quarrel, and the mother scolds at the top of her voice.

Through and through his aching head goes the noise and the babel, and he is glad to get under the bed-clothes and to cover up his ears to escape from it.

Poor little Tim is much in awe of the big, rough woman. She is violent-tempered and

seldom sober, and her way of treating her own children often makes him tremble at her approach.

But he is more in awe of the children still; or, rather, of one of them—the eldest, a big, tawny-haired boy who goes by the name of Wild Mike.

No one can manage Wild Mike. His mother's hard words and harder blows have no effect upon him. He is the terror of all the children in the street; a born bully, reckless and cruel.

In Tim's healthy days Wild Mike was always his tormentor; now that he is ill he is completely in the cruel boy's power. Mike waits till Tim is alone, and then takes from the terrified child his biscuits, his lozenges, the orange he has to suck when he is thirsty, and makes off before anyone can come.

Ah! little does Tim's mother dream, as she toils away at the laundry, of all her sick

child suffers at the hands of that cruel, rough boy. Little does she dream that the hardly-procured luxuries which she has placed so carefully by her boy's side before she left him, the worsted shawl she has spread so tenderly over him, are removed the moment her back is turned. She strides along, in the teeth of the east wind, rejoicing that she has deprived herself of that shawl—for at least her child is warm though she is cold—little dreaming that it is tied round Wild Mike's throat. And she will never find it out; for Mike, a coward at heart, like all bullies, will put it back exactly where he found it, before there is a chance of her return; and he has stood over little Tim, and threatened him with all the dreadful things that he will do to him the next time he catches him alone, if he dares to tell her.

They were a wild, bad set of people amidst whom Tim and his mother dwelt; and only

the direst necessity would have compelled her to live among them.

She had been trying to get another habitation just before the beginning of Tim's illness: but his having fallen ill so suddenly had prevented her carrying out her intentions.

So his sufferings have been sadly and needlessly aggravated by the cruel treatment he has all the time received, and of which his mother knows nothing.

But Wild Mike's visits to his bedside are only periodical, like the presence of the mother and the rest. For the most part of the day Tim is quite alone; and if it were not that the room is warmer when they are all there he would rather be so. For when they are all out, and the room is empty, no tongue can describe how he suffers from the cold. The door is always left open by the last child who goes out of the room, and the window is broken. There are cold draughts rushing in

everywhere. Tim is never really warm till his mother returns at night, shuts up the door, stuffs up the window, and gets into bed with him.

How he longs for her return! How he thinks of it, dreams of it, patiently waits for it!

Such a safe, protected feeling comes over him in her presence; such joy at feeling her so near!

The thought of that home-coming is what keeps him happy: is the one bright spot in the darkness of his day.

What a life for a child to lead! Cold, sick, and very lonely. Not a toy nor a picture-book to beguile him.

Nothing to amuse him all the long, weary day.

Nothing to distract him from his pain.

Nothing to think of but how his head swims and his bones ache and his cough tears him to pieces.

Nothing to do but to lie and wonder how soon the day will be over and his mother return to him again.

To lie there watching for her coming, and counting the minutes as they slowly pass by. Listening, listening ever for the sound of her step upon the stairs.

Waiting and wearying for her footfall long before there is a chance it can be heard.

Almost as soon as her parting kiss is given, and ere the echo of her receding footstep has quite died away, he begins to listen. Hark! that footstep! is it coming? Will it climb the stair?

Steps on the stair there are many, coming and going, all day long.

Steps so many and so various that only the ear of love could distinguish one among them all.

Rough steps, hurried steps, unsteady steps, steps faltering and slow; steps worn and weary

with the burden of life they have to carry, belonging to hearts more worn and weary still. Tramp, tramp, their confused and varied treading sounds in his ears all day long.

Tramp, tramp, yet ever seeks he to distinguish the one he loves, the one he knows so well.

Sometimes their familiar sounding soothes him into sleep at last. Towards evening, snatches of oblivion beguile the weary time.

And then bright dreams and fancies scare all his pain away.

Come with me now this evening, and for a moment look upon the child.

See how he lies there, dreaming, pain and sorrow cheated of their power.

He is dreaming of a toy-shop window, and a lighted Christmas-tree.

In his dream he sees a little figure (which is himself) leaning against the window, and wistfully gazing in.

Clearly before him are rising the joys that have never been his.

Armies of red tin soldiers are passing before him now!

Heaven be thanked for that Heaven-sent dreaming, brief and broken though it be!

For tramp, tramp, soon sounds through his uneasy slumber, and he is roused from his happy dream.

To wake in the foggy twilight, deepening into darkness again.

Poor child! bereft of his fancies, fresh from a dream of joy; does sorrow come down upon his spirit as the darkness comes down into the room? No!

For now that it is dark she will be coming! Her step will be heard very soon!

Hark! up the stair ascending, it is coming, at last, at last! . . .

Someone stands upon the threshold, someone advances to the bed.

The sight he has wearied and longed for, is before him now. See how his eyes are glowing! How radiant his wan, weak smile!

Oh! Sight to the child so glorious! What is there in thee which we cannot see?

To eyes by love illumined is vouchsafed a vision to which ours are quite, quite blind.

We judge of its power and of its beauty only by its effect on him.

For *he* sees what makes his heart beat loudly, and irradiates his countenance with a gleam of joy.

And *we* see nothing but a faded woman, with the stamp of care upon her weary brow.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN NIGHT IS DARKEST DAWN IS NEAREST

CHAPTER II.

Tim never tells his mother of his troubles. Perhaps he fears to, for she is strong and vigorous, and her maternal instincts are strong and vigorous too.

If the lioness in her were roused, Wild Mike's fate would be a rough one; and there have, at times, been passages between the two, which the sick child would be sorry to see repeated.

Or it may be that, in the joy of her return to him, the memory of his troubles flees away.

There are other things of which he does not tell her, because it would grieve her so. He never tells her how hard he tries to wake

her at night, when she is sleeping by his side, and how his poor little voice is unheeded.

For he has nights of horror, and dreams in which the fears of the day return with terror tenfold.

And when he wakes in the thick darkness, trembling and panic-stricken, he longs for the sound of her voice.

Often his terrified cry is heard in the night: 'Mother! wake up and speak to me. Wake up and give me your hand.'

But, young and very wearied, she sleeps heavily and sound. His piteous voice does not reach her, and she answers him not a word.

The Irishwoman, more wakeful, calls out to him harshly to hold his tongue, and go to sleep; and at the sound his heart beats louder, and he cowers closer to his mother's side.

But still, in spite of its terrors, the night passes only too quickly. He grieves when it is over and the foggy day begins.

For then she must rise and leave him—leave him to his lonely day.

We need not linger on this part of his history, week after week going by the same. Pass we on to a day yet darker, but the darkest before the dawn.

It was at about three o'clock one afternoon at the end of February that a thick yellow fog came quite suddenly on. The Irish children and their mother got home safely, though with difficulty, and very late.

But, alas! for poor little Tim! He waited and wearied for a footstep that never came at all.

The night fell, and his mother had not returned.

Other people in the house began at last to wonder, and to get uneasy as to what could have befallen her.

By-and-by news came from below—news, in its meaning to the child, of a length and

breadth of woe immeasurable, embodied in one short sentence :—

'Knocked down by a cart in the fog, and carried to St. George's Hospital.'

. . . . . .

Let us drop the curtain we have lifted, over the days that followed, and hide the despair of the child. Why should we paint his desolation when each one can imagine it so well?

Daily he drooped; and the little strength he had, slowly ebbed away.

Some of the women from below came in and out, and did what they could for him.

But they felt it would be of no avail.

His frail little body grew weaker, for his spirit was broken.

'He has no heart,' they said, 'to get well.'

The doctor was sent for at last, who came and looked at him, and listened to his cough, and shook his head.

In another place, he said, and under other circumstances, the child might get well; but as it was! . . .

As it was, he drew the coverings closer round him, gave him an orange and some lozenges to suck when his cough was 'troublesome,' and said that was all he could do for him.

The real remedies were beyond his power to prescribe.

Pure air and sunlight, a properly ventilated apartment, quiet, warmth, and cleanliness; care, attention, and strengthening food; the touch of skilful hands, the sound of kind voices; an atmosphere of gentleness, kindness, and regularity: such were the aids that alone could restore the child.

In default of these, he gave him, as we have already said, an orange and some lozenges, and went his way. The women, who had collected to hear the doctor's verdict, stood round the

bed, talking freely, giving it as their opinion that it would be better he should die, and that it 'wouldn't be long first.' That if his mother died in the hospital, or was a cripple all her life, the child would be much better gone; for what was to become of him if he lived?

Then they went away too.

Tim is alone again—alone with his weakness and his pain.

In mortal terror too; for Wild Mike will return directly, now that the doctor's visit is over, to see if he has left anything good behind.

Tim, with his heart beating wildly, is listening for his noisy step upon the stair. He has got his orange under his pillow, and his box of lozenges squeezed up tight in his left hand; but he knows he has no chance of retaining either if Mike is determined to take them away.

But some minutes elapse, and no Mike

appears; so, his fear having temporarily subsided, he begins to think of what he heard the women say.

He knows what they meant very well.

Death, in the homes of the poor, is a very familiar subject.

Yes, he knows what it means very well.

His father, so his mother had often told him, had been fetched away by the angels.

They came down one summer evening and carried him away.

Will they come and fetch him too?

Hark! a step upon the staircase, coming up the stair.

Soft and slow is the footstep, and a rustling softer still.

The rustling ceases on the threshold. A silence follows, for the footsteps pause for a minute ere they gently sound in the room.

And now the rustling is close at hand.

Something is bending over him—something

is touching his hair—and he opens his eyes with a smile.

His thoughts are all of the angels, and he thinks the angel who came to fetch his father must be come to fetch him now.

So, when his glance rests upon the fair face looking down upon him; when his eye travels on to the soft hair circling round her brow; when his starved heart drinks in the sorrowing pity that is shining in the blue eyes that are gazing so tenderly at him, he feels no fear, no surprise.

He only holds out his wasted arms and whispers: 'Are you God's angel, and have you come to take me away?'

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL VISION AT TIM'S BEDSIDE

CHAPTER III.

His visitor—a beautiful lady who has come straight from his mother's bedside in St. George's Hospital to satisfy that poor mother's longing to know how her boy is faring—gently shakes her head; and, kneeling beside him, she whispers such a message from that mother, that his sad eyes faintly sparkle, and then fill with tears of joy.

For he hears that she is alive and well; that she sends him her love and her blessing; and that she hopes at some time, not too far distant, to return to him again. That she longs to know if he is better, and thinks of him by night and by day.

Having delivered her message, the lady rises.

Gazing long at him, and then all round the wretched place in which she finds him, she is wondering what her answer is to be! Better? he is *not* better, and under his present circumstances she feels that better he will never be.

For the air is heavy and foul, the bed is uneasy, he is shivering with the cold from which his coverings are too scant to protect him; he appears to have no food and no medicine; and he is all alone!

Standing by him without speaking, she is revolving a plan for his deliverance in her head, and wondering how quickly she will be able to carry it out, for she feels there is no time to lose.

'I am not an angel,' she said at last, softly, 'but still I will carry you away.'

'What, then,' he whispered wistfully—so

taken up with his idea that he hardly heard the last words of her sentence—'are you,' he added, just touching with his little wasted hand the soft fur and velvet of which her dress was composed, 'the Queen?'

'No,' she said, smiling. 'I am a woman who loves little children, that's all.'

He slightly shook his head.

'You're never a woman,' he said. 'I know better than that.'

'Why not?' she questioned.

'Women don't never wear the like of this,' he answered, his hand still straying over the velvet and fur.

'Well, a lady, perhaps!'

'Ah! that's more like,' he said, 'but a very grand lady, ain't you? A kind of a princess, like, or something of that.'

'Have you never seen a lady before?' she enquired, without directly replying to his question.

'Never so close,' he answered. 'I've seed 'em, don't you know, in their carriages, or getting out at the shops, but never so as I could touch 'em.'

And with a pleased look he played again with the velvet and fur.

'But it ain't only the *clothes*,' he added, in a whisper, 'it's . . . . . it's . . . . . .'

'It's what?' she asked, looking down upon him with a smile.

He gazed up at her, but did not answer.

He could not express it, but he knew in himself that the being before him was as different in every way to the women he was accustomed to, as were her garments to those he was accustomed to see worn.

Her lovely colouring, her soft eyes, her general appearance, the harmony of the details of her dress; all this combined made a fair picture to him, and begat in him a faint idea of inward goodness as expressed by external beauty.

For if the outward covering were so fair what must the inward grace and glory be!

'Why do you come here?' he said, suddenly, as if it jarred upon him to see her in such a place.

'I came,' she said, 'to give you the message from your mother, and to see for myself how you were.'

'But why?' he persisted.

'Why?' she repeated, puzzled.

'I mean,' he said, 'you are such a grand, smart lady, and mother says they don't care for us poor.'

'Who does she say they care for?' she enquired.

'Only their own selves,' was the reply.

She looked grieved at his words. She felt so sorry the mother should inculcate such a doctrine, and still more so that she should believe in it herself.

But it is the inevitable result to those who only see the rich in the distance. Say what we will, the fact remains, that to the poor, the sight of the rich in their luxury, in sharp contrast to their own want, must ever create in their minds an idea of selfishness, and breed in their hearts bitter feelings of envy and dislike.

But once let the rich draw near to the poor, once let the poor believe in the human tenderness and sympathy of the rich, the first impression will be lost, the common ties of our common humanity will draw class to class, and envy and dislike will flee away.

But the rich must draw very near; near as Tim's beautiful visitor has been to the bedside of his mother in the hospital, near as she is standing by his wretched bedside now.

The lady's thoughts reverted to the grateful look on the poor woman's face as she had that day seen it, and her brow cleared.

She took little Tim's hand in hers.

'Dear child,' she whispered, 'your mother will not say so now.'

'What is the matter?' she added hastily, or she felt his grasp on her tighten, and a look of terror overspread his face.

She looked all round the room, and, seeing no cause for fear, she asked him what it was he was afraid of.

His look of terror did not abate; he held her tighter, and whispered 'Wild Mike.'

'A dog?' she questioned.

'Oh, no.'

'A man, then?'

'Oh, no.'

'A boy, perhaps?'

He held her tighter than ever: he nodded his head.

'What does he do to frighten you so?'

'I mustn't tell. I don't dare tell.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know *what* he won't do to me, if I tell.'

'No one shall hurt you while I am here,' she said, soothingly, 'so tell me all about it.'

'Ah! but when he catches me alone,' gasped little Tim.

'What?' she said quickly.

'I think he'll *kill* me,' whispered Tim.

A look of indignation shot out of her blue eyes; her colour came and went for a moment; but she only said, 'Don't be afraid. Trust me, he shall not touch you. Now tell me all about it.'

Whether it was the quiet of the room, or the soothing sense of human kindness and human protection; or whether it was an undefined trust in the power of anything so beautiful, that emboldened little Tim to tell of his long-hidden troubles, I do not know. But he allowed the sad story to be drawn from him, and almost before he was aware of it, he had told it all.

'But don't beat him for it,' he implored,

when he had finished. 'I couldn't bear to have him beat.'

The lady gave the required promise with a sad smile; and hardly had she done so, than Tim turned ashy white, and, clinging to her convulsively, he whispered: 'He is coming! Here he is!'

Gently disengaging herself from his grasp, she rose from her seat, and turned round to confront the intruder.

Wild Mike was advancing into the room, with an expression of greedy satisfaction in his eyes, and his whole air that of the bully intent upon his prey.

'Now, then!' he said, in his loud, rough tones, 'now, then! where's the . . . . . .'

He started back, as he came face to face with Tim's beautiful visitor.

There is a scene in 'Faust' where the sign of the cross is held up before the Wicked One, and at the sight of it a complete change comes

over his whole appearance. Triumphant in wickedness before, he suddenly quails and cringes. He shrinks away from it; he cowers before it; he does all he can to escape from it; his attitude all the time expressing the most abject terror and the deepest humiliation.

The symbol of truth and holiness seems to overwhelm him with the sense of his own vileness, and to reveal to him the blackness of his own darkness, by contrast with the thought of Christ's marvellous light!

Just so did the whole aspect of the boy-bully change at the sight of the fair woman standing by the bedside of his victim, with her steadfast eyes fixed full upon him.

Astonishment, awe, fear, mingled with something of reverence and admiration, by turns were painted on his face.

She stood confronting him; her blue eyes, still shining with the tears the story of his cruelty had brought into them; fixed sadly and reproachfully upon him.

And as the devil felt his own vileness at the sight of the cross, so did this wicked boy awake to a sense of his own wickedness in the presence of this beautiful woman.

Wherever he looked, her gaze followed him; turn where he would, he could not get away from it.

He seemed as if he would have given worlds to escape, and yet was rooted to the spot.

And, standing there, spell-bound, many and varied feelings rushed through his mind.

Her presence in that unclean garret filled him with wonder.

She looked like a being of another sphere amid those filthy and wretched surroundings.

Her general appearance told him of a harmony and of a spotlessness of which he knew nothing.

In contrast with her external fairness, he felt his own outward unsightliness; in contrast with her inward purity, he felt his own inward corruption.

And there dawned for the first time on the darkness of his mind a faint conception of a higher state of being, and of another and a purer world.

But above the wonder and the admiration was a sense of fear unspeakable; for her look told him she knew all—told him that the tale of his long course of oppression had been unfolded to her; told him also with what feelings she viewed his conduct.

Her brilliancy and her wealth told him of power, and the sense of her power terrified him.

It told him that his defenceless prey was no longer defenceless, but had found a rich and powerful protector; and, judging from his own corrupt point of view—he judged how she would use that power. Knowing how he used power himself, he judged that the hour of vengeance was at hand, and that Tim and his protector, leagued together, would reap a terrible retribution on his head.

And as the thought burst upon him, his cowardly heart failed him, and he turned and fled.

The lady remained gazing thoughtfully at the spot where he had disappeared, listening to the sound of his steps upon the staircase, in rapid and terrified descent.

Then she turned and knelt by Tim's bedside.

But the fear and the suspense had been too much for the frail little fellow, and he had fainted away.

CHAPTER IV.

VICTORIA HOSPITAL

CHAPTER IV.

Tim never afterwards very clearly remembered what followed.

He had dim recollections of things that might have been dreams or might not; of the sensation of being lifted and carried in somebody's arms, of rumbling over stones in some sort of conveyance, of stopping, of being lifted and carried again, of being laid down gently, of the sound of voices, of the touch of kind hands; but it was all very dreamy and indistinct. His next clear recollection was his own surprise at waking up from a sound sleep and a dream of red tin soldiers, and finding he had got a little red jacket on.

Was he still dreaming, or had he turned into a tin soldier in the night? The idea made him laugh, but it was such a very weak little laugh that he hardly caught the sound of it himself.

What could have happened? and where could he be?

That he was not in his wretched little bed in the cold garret he was quite sure, for he felt so warm and snug. His bed was easy and comfortable, his pillow was soft; there were no cold draughts, it was quite light, and the sloping roof, which generally came down so close over his bed that he could touch it with his hand, was gone. Glancing his eye upwards he could see the ceiling right up in the air, oh! so far away.

He lay still a little while, thinking.

Connecting his present happy circumstances with his angelic visitor, he thought, perhaps, he was in heaven, and that after all she *was* an

angel and had carried him away. He put his hand behind him to see if he had got wings, but could feel nothing but a flannel jacket and his own very sharp little bones.

So then he felt sure he was mistaken. Besides, had she not distinctly told him she was not an angel, but only a lady who loved little sick children like him?

Before, however, he could think it out, one of his terrible fits of coughing came on.

Somebody came and raised him very gently while he coughed, and when the fit was over gave him something very pleasant to drink, and gently laid him down again.

He was very much puzzled.

There seemed in this wonderful place to be people at hand to guess what he wanted, and to give it to him directly.

So quietly, too. There was no noise or bustle, and they touched him and moved him so that it did not hurt him or bother him the least.

What could it mean? A dream? Oh, yes! a dream, of course. Presently he should wake up again and find himself in all his wretchedness at home.

But by-and-by he was gently raised again and some hot broth given him.

This was no dream, for he could taste it quite well.

After he had drunk as much as he wanted he was laid down again. Kind hands smoothed his hair away from his brow and tucked him up comfortably. Something very soft and warm was put to his feet, and he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was getting dark, and his heart failed him.

The long, dark night was coming, the night that he dreaded so!

He slept again, for he was very weary, but his fears followed him.

He dreamt he was back again in the crowded garret. Harsh voices and noisy foot-

steps sounded in his ear, and close by his side was the form of Wild Mike, with flaming eyes and threatening gestures, asking him how he dared tell the lady all he had told.

And he cried out in his fear, and started up in bed, and woke with a beating heart, with the horror of his dream upon him, and a yet greater horror of waking in the black darkness, and finding himself alone.

He opened his eyes to find a soft light burning in the room, shedding its rays on the watchful form of a woman, sitting at a table near; and at the sound of his cry she was at his side in a moment, and she soothed him with kind words, and told him his dream was nothing, and that he had no one to fear.

And she gave him something to drink, and laid him down again, and told him she would sit by his side and take care of him.

'There are no Wild Mikes here,' she said, for he kept on piteously entreating her to keep Wild Mike away.

So, with his eyes fixed trustfully upon her, and with a sense of peace in her protection to which he had long been a stranger, he grew quiet again. He slept on and off, Wild Mike's form visiting him every now and then; but whenever he woke he found the light still burning, and his protector still there.

All through the night she sat and watched, and was ever at hand to tell him his dreams were nothing and that he had no one to fear.

Towards morning he slept soundly, and dreamt no more.

CHAPTER V.

REALIZED JOYS, AND DREAMS COME TRUE AT LAST

CHAPTER V.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and the sound of childish voices and childish laughter was sounding in the room.

He raised himself and gazed round with wonder and delight. For all round the room were ranged little beds like his; and on each little bed was a scarlet coverlet, and in each little bed was a little sick child, with a little red jacket on.

They seemed to him like those red tin soldiers, on which his thoughts so often ran.

Some were sitting up, and some were lying down.

Two women were standing at a table in the

middle of the room, cutting slices of bread and butter and pouring out cups of milk and water and tea.

He lay back again, and wondered if he were going to have any or not.

He was not kept long in doubt. A little board was put across his crib; a cup of milk and water and some bread and butter were placed upon it; he was gently raised, and the cup held to his lips. He was then given a slice of bread and butter, and told he might eat it or not, as he felt inclined.

He felt very much inclined.

It was so white and so thin and so good. He was a long while eating and thinking, and, perhaps, dozing a little; for when he raised himself again to peep through the bars of his crib, all the other children had done breakfast. Some were sitting up in bed, playing with toys, or looking at picture-books. One or two were sitting in little chairs by the fire, and two or

three more were dressed, and were standing by the bedsides of the others, helping them to play.

This time Tim caught the eye of one of the young women, and she advanced to his side.

But she was not his friend of the night, and his expression must have shown her he was puzzled; for she explained to him that the night nurse had gone away to rest, and that she herself was one of the day nurses.

'But tell me what you were going to ask her?' she said. 'Is there anything you want to know?'

'Oh! if you please, ma'am,' he said, in a little weak whisper, 'could you tell me where I'm got to, and how I got here, and how long I'm going to stop?'

'You are in the Victoria Hospital for little sick children,' she answered, kindly. 'A lady had you brought here, and you're going to stop till we make you quite well again. Is there anything else?' she added, smiling.

'Oh! if you *please*, who do all them toys belong to?'

'To any little child who comes here,' she answered.

The reply almost took his breath away. He could hardly believe his ears.

He rubbed his eyes as if he thought he was dreaming.

'Ain't there no glass, then, between me and the toys?' he said, in a whisper, 'what's gone with the glass?'

Without attempting to answer this incomprehensible question, she placed upon his board a box of toys, and, propping him up with pillows, told him he might play with them as long as he liked.

Did his eyes deceive him? Red tin soldiers

'The glass *must* be there,' he whispered to himself; and he stretched out his hands, expecting to come in contact with it.

His trembling fingers go straight into the box!

He touches the soldiers; he handles them; he lifts them out one by one. They are his to do as he wills with.

Oh, fulfilled ambitions! realised joys, and dreams come true at last!

It was almost worth his long winter of suffering to be brought face to face with such joys as these!

Wondrous to the child of Want and Poverty was it to have in his own hands, and at his own disposal, the very toys he had so often and so wistfully gazed at in the toy-shops, feeling they were not for such as he.

So often, peering in at them out of the darkness, had he felt that he could touch them, they seemed so near.

So often had he stretched out his hand to try and feel them, and come in contact with the hard, cold wall of glass.

So often had he realized that between him and them there was a great gulf fixed.

And now the gulf is bridged over ; the glass is gone ; the long-coveted joys are his !

'You may play with them as long as you like,' he repeats, in trembling tones of joy.

No more weary counting of the minutes, as they slowly pass by.

No more wondering how soon the long dull day will be gone.

Hour after hour he plays with them, all day long.

For many succeeding days, too, they were all-in-all to him.

Nothing but sheer exhaustion would make him put them aside. Oh! it was a wonderful place that he had got into.

Quickly and happily the days passed by.

When he was tired of playing he would lie back and watch all that was going on in the room.

There was always plenty to see and to interest. First, there were the visits of the

kind doctors, who always said something cheery and amusing to each little invalid.

Gentlemen and ladies, too, passed through very often, and stopped, questioning kindly, first at one little bed, and then at another.

Sometimes their little children came with them; happy little children, healthy little children, with colours in their cheeks, and smiles in their eyes, gazing with wonder and sympathy at the little sufferers all round.

'Mamma,' said one impetuous sympathiser, after giving a horrified glance at Tim's wan, sad face, 'I think I'll send this little boy my new rocking-horse. He looks so unhappy.'

'I'll make you a scrap-book,' said a little girl, nodding encouragingly at him from the foot of his crib, 'with funny pictures in it to make you laugh. You'll promise to laugh?' she added, anxiously.

Tim liked to see them and hear them, though for the first little while after his ar-

rival he felt too weak to answer or smile much.

But in a short time there was a great improvement in little Tim's condition. He coughed less, he slept more. His appetite got better, and there began to be a little more flesh upon his bones. He looked happier, cleaner, brighter. He smiled more, and he even laughed at times. He did not get so tired when he sat up as he had done at first, and the form of Wild Mike no longer visited him in his dreams.

He grew more inclined to talk to the nurses and to make friends with the other children. He took more interest in the visitors, and shily answered their kind enquiries.

He liked to see the ladies pass by. The soft sweep of their dresses was inexpressibly soothing to him; bringing back to him the rustling that had sounded on the stair in his wretched home. And the sound recalled to him the

vision that had there appeared to him and rescued him from all his woe.

Every day when the visitors' hour came his eye eagerly followed every lady as she passed through the room, but his beautiful visitor was never among them; and he began at last to think she must, after all, have been an angel, and, having done what God had told her, had returned to the Heaven whence she came.

As the afternoons grew longer, and the weather finer, the windows were kept open, and a soft air came in from the garden.

One or two little birds began to sing, the sun shone in, and everything looked cheery and bright.

The time wore on, the days grew quite long, Tim began to feel as if he had been in the hospital a long while, and still there was no news of his 'beautiful lady.'

Among many reasons why Tim longed for her was that he was wearying for news of his mother.

She had brought him news before; so she would be the one to do so again.

And he did so long to know if his mother was getting better.

He wanted her, too, to know how happy he was, and how well he was beginning to feel. He knew it would gladden her so.

He wondered also, how soon she would be sufficiently recovered to come and see him.

For the other children's mothers often came; and Tim watched wistfully from his pillow the happy meetings, in which he longed to share.

It was a pretty sight to see the mothers hurrying in, each with her eye and her mind fixed on the one particular little bed, that contained her own peculiar treasure.

Little wasted arms were held out, smiles played on little white lips; and tears of joy were shed by the mothers as they marked the improvement in the little pale faces.

Sometimes a little convalescent was triumphantly borne off by his exulting parent; his own joy at returning home in restored health, largely mingled with regret at saying goodbye to all his friends, and leaving a place where he had been so happy.

The boy who occupied the bed next to Tim was the first to get well and go home; and Tim missed him very much for the first few hours after his departure.

But, on confiding his regret to one of the nurses, he was informed that he need not fret, for that a new boy would be coming in, in the afternoon.

'Bless your heart,' she said, 'you need never be afraid of being lonely; as fast as a bed is empty it is filled again, and it would be the same if we had twenty more. They are waiting by dozens to come in. More's the pity we have not more room for them.'

Hearing this, Tim was happy, and fell asleep for a while.

When he awoke he found, to his surprise, that the bed was already occupied.

The new-comer had arrived while he was sleeping.

A form was lying there all in a heap. 'He is very ill indeed,' said Tim to himself.

He raised himself and peeped over his crib. 'New boy,' he said, 'what is your name ?'

The heap moved, but there was no answer.

Tim, who had grown quite friendly with other children, persisted.

'New boy,' he said again, 'turn round, and let me see your face.'

The sheet was drawn down for a minute, and a white face peeped out.

The next moment such a cry of terror rang through the room that the nurses came rushing to Tim's bedside to ask what was the matter.

But he could not speak; he could not tell them.

He could only point to the bed next him with his trembling fingers, and turn his terrified eyes upon them with a mute appeal for protection.

For the face that had peeped at him from under the bedclothes—was the face of Wild Mike

END OF PART I.

PART II.

CHAPTER VI.

A WINTER'S NIGHT IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

CHAPTER VI.

When Wild Mike fled in terror from the presence of the beautiful woman by Tim's bedside, he dashed into the street, and ran on and on, heedless of where he went.

His one idea was to put as great a distance as possible between himself and what had so powerfully affected him, and to escape from the retribution which he felt sure was impending.

He did not stop till he got into the Park by the Albert Memorial. He waited a minute or two to recover his breath, and then set off again.

He dashed down the avenue which leads towards Kensington Palace, and then, feeling

that to be too public a spot, he turned off short to the right, and disappeared farther into the recesses of Kensington Gardens.

At last, thoroughly exhausted, he threw himself down on the damp grass to rest.

He lay there panting, going over the recent interview in his mind.

He felt as if he could never return to the garret.

His guilty conscience told him of many acts, besides his cruelty to Tim, which might come to light if public attention were drawn to him, and ideas of punishment and policemen—of prison even—passed in hot haste through his brain.

No, he could never go back—never face Tim and his protector again. He would run away and go to sea.

Many of his street friends had done so when they had got into trouble, and he knew, or thought he knew, how to set about it.

He must get out of the Park, and take the road to the river, from whence he imagined he should find his way to the London Docks.

There was no time to be lost, as the daylight was beginning to fade, and it was getting very foggy. So he got up, and began to walk slowly on.

But the fog increased every moment, and soon he found to his dismay that he could hardly see two yards in front of him. He walked on as quick as he could ; he dared not go very fast, for he was afraid of knocking up against the trees.

The fog got thicker and thicker every moment, and the daylight was fast disappearing.

Mike's heart began to beat loudly, for, like all guilty people, he had a horror of being alone in the dark.

He groped his way along, holding out his hands before him like a blind man ; but the

fog got so thick at last that he could not see the trees till he was close upon them.

It burst upon him then, that he should never find his way out of the Park, and mortal terror took hold of him at the thought of being locked up there all night.

His craven heart failed him, and he cried out in his fear.

He set off running with all his might, calling for help, and crying bitterly.

In his headlong course he came suddenly against a tree, and, falling over and over, with his head against the trunk, he was stunned for a moment, and felt too giddy and sick to go on.

But terror impelled him, and he got up and started off again, groping his way, and sobbing and crying as he went.

He never perceived that, in his confusion, he had turned his back upon the way by which he had entered, and was plunging ever deeper and deeper into the Park.

One step more, and, with a loud splash, he fell into the water.

It was the Kensington Palace Pond. For a moment the waters closed over his head; but he clung with all his strength to the bank, and regained his footing in the mud. Clinging with all his might and main, he managed to scramble out, covered with mud from head to foot, soaked to the skin, and shivering with cold.

In this miserable plight he once more flung himself down on the ground, and screamed and cried in impotent wrath and despair. For he knew where he was now, and how far he had wandered from the path which led out into the streets again.

He knew how hopeless it was for him to find his way through the avenues, and he realised that he should have to stay where he was till morning.

All night long the wretched boy wandered

about the Park, sinking down and sleeping sometimes, when exhausted nature could endure no longer, but ever waking in terror, and starting to his feet again.

Awakened sometimes by ghastly dreams and fancies, sometimes by the chattering of his own teeth, which he could not keep together, sometimes by the very pain of the bitter cold from which he was suffering.

He feared to fall asleep, and he dreaded to remain awake.

Terrors of all kinds came over him, natural and supernatural. An evil conscience and a vivid imagination brought all sorts of horrors to his mind. Sleeping, horrid forms scared and terrified him; and waking, imaginary sights and sounds filled his breast with fear.

Every wicked thing he had ever done passed in review before him that dreadful night.

His recent cruelty to Tim haunted him as a presence from which he could not escape.

Wherever he looked he saw the child's white face, now terrified, now pleading, now weeping; and he seemed to hear his weak voice imploring him not to take *all* his food away—to leave him just *one* little drop of something, with which to moisten his parched and fevered lips.

Mike screamed aloud at last, and prayed that the face might depart from him.

He made the most solemn vows, the most earnest promises, that he would never molest Tim again, if only he would take his face away from before him, and not haunt him so.

The very sound of his own cries brought new terror into his panic-stricken breast.

In the morning a bundle, more dead than alive, was picked up by the Park-keeper, and carried to the nearest police-station.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUESTION WHICH FINDS NO ANSWER

CHAPTER VII.

The restoratives that were applied revived him sufficiently to enable him to give his name and address, and he was carried home on a stretcher

So, to the garret whence he had so precipitately fled, he was restored in a state far more pitiable than that of his former victim, and placed in Tim's vacant bed.

There, for many days and nights, he lay and suffered.

The doctor gave no hope of his recovery, unless he could be sent, like Tim, to the Children's Hospital.

His mother did her best to procure him an order of admission among the different families

where she was employed; but she was told the hospital was quite full, and that there was no chance of a vacancy for some time to come.

Foiled in this, her last hope, she wept and wailed over him in loud and violent grief, and railed at the selfishness of the rich, who would not spare a little money to provide a few more beds, and so save her child.

For it was only too probable that by the time a vacancy occurred, Mike would be beyond the reach of all human help.

She then, to drown her despair, took to drinking more deeply than ever, and so rendered herself useless, and worse than useless, to her unfortunate boy.

So, in neglect, and in cold, and in misery, Wild Mike lies, as Tim did, day after day. His turn now to count the weary moments as they slowly pass by. His turn to wonder how soon the dark foggy day will be done.

Over him, too, the women come and cackle, and he hears that he must die.

Hears it with terror unspeakable, with shrinking, and with loathing, and with fear.

Hears it, and cries aloud with horror, and raves, and screams, and prays to be allowed to live a little longer.

Night and day the thought of death pursued and haunted him; and the dread of it took hold upon him more and more.

One minute, in impotent wrath and fury, he would cry that he *could* not, *would* not die. The next, in cowardly terror, he would clasp his hands and give vent to the most abject entreaties to be spared *this* time, only this once; and to be allowed to return to the world again.

This intense fear of death, this clinging to a life which could have but few charms, which was bright with few happy recollections, few future hopes, sprang, alas! almost entirely from his blank incapacity of realising a higher state of

being, and a happy, because holy, world. To him such things meant simply nothing.

Was it to be wondered at? Conceptions of what we have never seen must vary according to the mind that conceives them, and the mind forms its conceptions from that by which it is surrounded.

Taught by his surroundings, what could his mind conceive of a world 'in which dwelleth righteousness'? 'To the pure,' says St. Paul, 'all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their very mind and conscience is defiled.'

And thus it was with this wretched boy. His very mind and conscience was defiled.

Every man projects himself upon the world and colours it accordingly, white or black.

To one mind, then, all is purity; to another, all corruption.

And Mike's wicked heart and polluted mind, projected on the world, made it all as black and bad as he.

To him was nothing pure, and no one holy.

To him God was a Being of awful power and vengeance, relentless, implacable, and cruel.

For, not being able to conceive of holiness, he invested Him only with His attribute of power.

And, judging of Him by himself, he endowed Him with the motives by which he was himself actuated.

He imagined God pursuing, with fearful vengeance, those who had offended Him; just as he himself relentlessly wreaked revenge upon his enemies, especially those who were weaker than he.

Heaven, then, being thus to him an impossible blank, and God, in His character of a Father, an unknown God, there was nothing in the thought of that which lay before him but 'a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,' and the overwhelming conviction

that it was a 'fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.'

Day and night his mind dwelt on these things; 'on the worm which dieth not, and the fire which never shall be quenched.'

He would have given worlds to escape for a moment from the torment of his own thoughts, to turn them for an instant's rest into some other channel; but, cast them back as he would, there was not one holy recollection, not one pure and peaceful memory to help him to change their current.

Backwards or forwards, it was all the same.

No peace, no rest anywhere.

Behind, the horror of past wickedness; and in front, the dread of retribution!

Suddenly, one day, athwart the gloom and the terror of his own thoughts, came the recollection of a face he had once seen for a minute; a fair young face, with an expression of mingled sadness and reproach painted on it.

It came with an infinitely soothing feeling, like the sight of a pure, deep well, in the midst of a hot, sandy plain.

It eased him inexpressibly, and gave a fresh turn to his thoughts. As the days wore on, he often cooled, as it were, the fiery heat of his tormented mind, by calling it up before him.

At first he was content to call it up, and gaze upon it; but after a time he took to thinking about it, and to trying to recall the feelings it had created in him at the time he saw it. The more he dwelt upon it the clearer the scene returned.

Back came the memory of his own sense of outward unsightliness, by contrast with her external fairness; of the feeling of her inward purity, as opposed to his inward corruption.

Back, too, with a flash, the faint dawning of the thought of a higher state of being, and of another and a purer world.

Over and over the same road his thoughts

daily travelled, and each time got a little bit further into the light.

He took to speculating on her, her life, that other world from out of which she had come, her motive for coming.

It was not, evidently, as he had once thought, to use her power upon him, to heap retribution upon his head; for the days had come and gone since for many weary weeks, and nothing had happened.

Why, then, had she come?

She had come out of the light of her life into that gloomy and wretched garret; she had come in her beauty and her splendour into the midst of squalid poverty and filthy surroundings—what for? . . . She was not actuated by greed, nor by any other of the motives by which he was himself led and guided. What, then, could it be?

As time wore on he realised that she had come, that she *could* have come for no other

reason than to rescue a forlorn child from a miserable position; come to do an act of charity and unselfishness with no other motives but love and kindness; motives to him altogether unknown and incomprehensible.

And the boy marvelled, but went on thinking.

There *were*, then, in the world, other motives than those with which he was acquainted.

What was the power that set these motives working?—the power, in short, that made her do these things?

Something which he could not understand.

But the very idea that there was a power of which he knew nothing, sowed the first seeds of faith in his mind.

Through the blackness and wickedness of the world in which he lived, through the darkness of his own polluted mind, shone the one light he had ever had a glimpse of: the sight

of a goodness to him incomprehensible, robed in a beauty which even he could understand.

'Faith,' we are told, 'comes by hearing;' but faith comes also by seeing in others the fruits of that faith, so clear, so certain, that he who runs may read.

Day by day he evolved from these thoughts new ideas and fresh speculations.

The idea of retribution that he had at first connected with her, the feelings with which he had at first invested her, time had shown him to exist only in his own breast.

Perhaps—wondrous thought!—perhaps, in like manner, the idea of vengeance with which he invested God, might exist only in his own corrupt heart, which could not conceive of anything else.

For, opposed to the wrath and fury which constituted his idea of an all-powerful and avenging God, was that expression of sadness, of reproach rather than anger—of mournful

pity even—that had shone out of those soft eyes, in that well-remembered face. There dawned upon him therefrom the faint possibility of reproach without anger, of displeasure without revenge, of recoil from sin without hatred for the sinner — of *forgiveness*, in short.

Round this stupendous thought all his ponderings now centred.

Was there, then, mercy with God? Was there hope of forgiveness for such as he?

How, *how* was he to get the question answered?

Who, *who* would tell him what he craved to know?

Day after day worked in his mind this question, which could not be answered anyway. . . .

. . . . . .

The order of admission to the Children's

Hospital came at last, and the sick boy was removed to its sheltering care.

He was too ill, however, by that time, for outward circumstances to make much difference to him ; but still he was eager to go.

For Tim was there, and he wanted to see him, and to beg his forgiveness for all his cruelty.

Would Tim forgive ? he wondered.

On this hung, in Mike's mind, the chance of the pardon of God. By this he should know if there was forgiveness above.

Thus would the question find an answer which had worked in his mind so long.

He should gauge God's mercy by Tim's forgiveness.

We have seen how his hopes ended.

When he saw the effect the very sight of him had on his former victim, when he heard him cry to the nurses, and saw them hurry to his bed, he gave up all for lost, and his unspoken petition for pardon died away on his lips.

Too weak and confused to realise that Tim was frightened, and that the nurses saw the only way to quiet him was promptly to remove the new-comer from his side, Mike mistook the child's looks and gestures for wrath and hatred, and his own subsequent removal for Tim's scheme of revenge.

He saw no more of him, for he was established for good in a different ward; but he had seen enough to convince him that all his hopes were vain.

For, if with this gentle child there was no forgiveness, what could he hope for from God?

He returned to the misery of his former opinions.

Rolled up in a heap, he maintained a sullen silence, and turned away from everybody.

So the old question went unanswered, and his life ebbed away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEAUTIFUL VISION AGAIN

CHAPTER VIII.

It is a lovely spring afternoon, and the Victoria Hospital is full of visitors.

Their hands are laden with spring flowers, which they have brought to show the little sufferers, how nature is waking to life again, in the green fields and country lanes.

Little weak hands are joyfully grasping primroses and violets, and eyes are sparkling with delight at the sight of what some have never seen before, some will never see again.

Tim is much, much better. He is up and dressed, and playing by the bedside of one of the other children.

He is twining flowers in the hair of the

little girl with whom he is playing, and his happy laugh rings out merrily and clear.

Suddenly, he stops laughing, and turning his head half-round, he stands listening intently, a half-defined hope rising in his breast.

For a sound of soft rustling has fallen on his ear !

It must, it can be, no other than she!

And, his heart beating high with hope and expectation, he leaves the bedside and turns to the door.

With her hands full of golden daffodils, with her soft eyes looking down upon him, and the smile he remembers so well, she is standing close beside him!—the visitor long-expected, long-looked-for—come at last!

All shyness forgotten, he runs up to her, his hands extended, his face bright with joy, scattering his own path with the flowers that, in his excitement, he allows to fall.

She drops hers too. She takes both his

hands. She exclaims with delight at the improvement in his appearance.

She looks at him with unfeigned pleasure, and assures him she hardly knows him again; that she can scarcely believe he is the same pale, sad, little boy she remembers.

She tells him she has been very ill herself for many weeks, or she would have been to see him long ago.

Then, drawing him to a seat beside her, she gives him news of his mother—good news, wondrous news, news almost too good to be true. 'Your mother is quite, quite well,' she whispers. 'She is to leave the hospital to-day, and on her way home she is coming here to see you; she will be here in a very little while. I have sent the carriage to fetch her, she cannot be many minutes now.'

Leaving Tim to take in the full joy of this information at his leisure, she rose to visit some of the other little beds.

We will watch her as she goes her rounds.

She seems to have some secret understanding with the children, for each looks up and smiles as she draws near.

A peevish baby, who keeps on whining, stops its wail as she comes to its crib.

A cross little boy, who will speak to no one, holds up his toys for her to see.

A shy girl, who has turned away from all the other ladies, lifts trusting eyes to her face.

It is the same wherever she bends her steps; and, though the room is full of other visitors, the children seem to have eyes for no one but her.

Many and various were the visitors to the Children's Hospital, and as many and various the reasons why they came.

Some had had sick children of their own, who had been restored to them in health again; and these came, with full and grateful hearts,

to show their thankfulness by doing what they could for other little sick children.

Some had had sick children who had *not* been restored to them ; and these came to lavish on the children of others the care and attention which was no longer needed by their own.

Others, whose homes were childless, and whose lives were objectless and dull, came to create new interests, and to fill up their empty day.

Others came from a pure love of doing good, or a natural love of children.

Some, again, from mere curiosity, or a desire for occupation.

And there were others, who, finding the emptiness of pleasure and the unsatisfying nature of this world's good, in whose homes, perhaps, Death had been busy, and the brightness of whose lives had fled, were turning to charity as a last resource.

But Tim's 'beautiful lady' came not from such motives as these.

Rich in the love of husband and of children, she came that out of her own abundance she might give to those who lacked; so happy in the love and brightness with which her own path in life was flooded, that she longed to pour some of its overflowing upon the hard, dusty pathway of others.

Dowered with the gift of beauty, it was in her consecrated, like any other talent, to the service of God.

She could not but see that she could soothe or influence, could elevate or cheer, where others, less gifted, failed.

She could not but see that wan faces brightened as their eyes rested on anything so fair.

She recognised in her God-given beauty a power, an influence, and a responsibility, which it was her life-long endeavour to turn to account.

Recognised it all without a spark of vanity, or the faintest glorying in the homage it brought her.

Homage of all kinds she found in the world she lived in; and she was indifferent to it all.

She could 'put the cup of this world's gladness to her lips, and yet be unintoxicated; gaze on all its grandeur, and yet be undazzled; feel its brightness, and yet defy its thrall.'

She lived in it, but not of it, ready in a moment to leave it all.

Her great desire was to use her talent for the glory of Him who had committed it to her keeping.

Often, then, was she to be found in the different hospitals, or by the bedsides of the suffering poor at home.

Rough men looked gratefully at her; dying eyes gazed reverently upon her; gazed, and were helped to realise a land peopled by such as she; the saints and angels they were so soon to see. The roughest and rudest, who could not grasp the idea of goodness from an abstract idea, were led by the sight of her beauty to the thought of

the holiness it expressed. For in beauty that vague idea of gentleness and purity and goodness which is for ever haunting our minds finds something of a shape.

And, being thus the earthly type of a heavenly perfection, unseen as yet, it may be made a stepping-stone to lead our hearts to the thought of that heavenly perfection, and so on to the knowledge of God.

If the song of the bird raises in our hearts a psalm of thanksgiving; if the sight of Nature in her grandeur or her loveliness lifts our minds to the thought of the Great Creator, why should not beauty raise our thoughts beyond itself, and be one of the many voices that speak to our souls of God?

There are, we are told, so many voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. . . .

Having spoken a word in turn to each little child, she went into the adjoining room.

She stopped before a bed in which something was lying in a motionless heap, and beckoned to the nurse in charge of the ward.

'Who is this?' she enquired.

'A poor Irish boy,' was the answer. 'He was very ill when he was admitted, and the doctors have no hopes of him at all. He never speaks to anyone, but lies as you see him day after day. It is little we have been able to do for him, but anything we could think of has been done. He seems half frightened, half sullen, poor boy, and will not answer when spoken to. Had he come in sooner the doctors say they might have saved him; but he came too late.'

The lady signed to the nurse to leave her, and advanced to the side of the bed alone.

There was little to be seen of its occupant but the outline of his head and forehead, and just a peep of his closed eyes, their dark lashes sweeping his white, hollow cheek; but she recognised him directly.

Tears of pity rose to her eyes as she gazed upon the piteous wreck before her.

The contrast between what she saw and the strong rough boy she remembered, came upon her with a sharp pang; and she had room in her heart for nothing but sorrow that his life should thus have been sacrificed, because the resources of the hospital were so limited.

A little more money, a few more beds, and he might have been saved.

Saved too, perhaps, in God's mercy, to repentance and amendment of life.

Sad, very sad were her thoughts as she stood by the boy who had 'come too late.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD, OLD STORY

CHAPTER IX.

The nurse retired and left the lady alone by the bed.

There was no one very near. The child in the next bed was sleeping, and the bed on the other side was empty, for its owner was up and dressed, and playing at the other end of the ward.

She stood there quite quiet and silent, and there was hardly a sound in the room.

And so it came to pass that Wild Mike, becoming conscious in the silence of a presence near him, drew the sheet cautiously down for a minute, and found the face of which he thought and dreamt so often looking down upon him.

He started visibly; a wonderful light broke over his face; and then he remained gazing fixedly at her, while thoughts of which she could guess nothing coursed through his mind.

For the very sight of her fair young face brings back the hopes that Tim had scared away.

The very expression of her eyes tells him of mercy, pity, and forgiveness.

All the reproach, even, that he remembers has gone out of them; there is only sorrow and tenderness now.

Back to his mind springs the old wonder; the old question trembles on his lips once more.

He must speak or die.

A terrific struggle follows.

He leans forward eagerly; he fixes on her an imploring eye, but no sound escapes his lips.

He tries again! he fights with his panting breath and his terrible weakness. It is his last hope, and speak he must and will.

And in the midst of his gasping the words suddenly come.

But, alas! so confused and rambling is his speech, that she cannot understand his vague account of the feelings with which we, who have followed them so long, are acquainted.

But, pained to see him suffer, longing to give him help, she listens with the most earnest attention; she strains mind and memory to assist her in striving to unravel his meaning, and she gleans at last a faint idea of what he is trying to say.

She gleans that he is vile and wicked, that he fears to die, and that he has no hope nor idea of mercy.

Something in the hopelessness of his manner affects her very deeply. It brings upon her an overwhelming conviction of what his state must be; of his sense of hopeless iniquity, of his deep, deep need of a Saviour and Mediator, and his awful ignorance of Christ.

For the moment her heart is so stirred within her that she cannot steady her voice to tell him the old, old story, and give his spirit rest.

But she controlled herself at last; and, sitting beside him, she took his hand, and spoke, in her soft low voice.

She put before him first man's wickedness, his weakness, rebellion, and sin.

She spoke of the spotless purity and holiness of Him in whom sin cannot dwell.

She showed how impossible it was that the one could approach the other.

And between the two she pictured the Saviour, reconciling God and man together.

She dwelt on the God-man dying for sinners, and on the load of guilt he bore.

And she spoke of the full, free pardon, the forgiveness, the mercy, the love.

'Do you see?' she whispered softly as she bent over the listening boy.

But he lay without sign or word.

Did he understand, she wondered, or was his mind too benighted, too weak ?

And she searched for an illustration to make what she said more clear.

It came directly.

For, turning her thoughts into the boy's dark past, the child he had treated so cruelly came at once to her mind.

She thought of the wretched garret where she had found that child, and of the piteous plight he had been in.

In quick contrast came the sight she had had of him to-day ; all health and joy and spirits ; his troubles ended and over ; their very memory passed away.

And glad at the thought, she bent down and whispered :

'As freely has God forgiven and forgotten, as Tim has forgiven you.'

She was amazed at the effect of her words.

His face was all disturbed again; the convulsive struggle returned; and he gasped out that Tim would not forgive him; that Tim had had him cast out and punished, and that, perhaps, God would cast him out too.

Gently she tried to reason with him, but it was of no avail. And she dared not question him further, he was so exhausted already.

So she saw the only way was to fetch little Tim to his side.

For only by the sense of human pardon could the heavenly mercy be brought to his benighted mind.

So she rose and went back into the adjoining room.

A very different scene was going on there.

Tim's mother had arrived, and the joy of the meeting between the mother and child had been such as to bring tears to the eyes of the nurses, accustomed, as they were, to such scenes.

When 'Tim's beautiful lady' entered, Mrs.

Collins, with her boy in her arms, was listening to the account of his recovery, which one of the nurses was giving at great length.

The lady therefore waited till it was over.

The little fellow had not had one drawback, the nurse was saying; his recovery had been slow, but sure.

At least only one, and that a very curious one. The arrival of an Irish boy had had such an effect upon him, he had been so terrified at the sight of him, that for a day or two he had slept badly, and suffered from dreams.

Mrs. Collins turned to Tim and asked him some close questions, which resulted in her hearing a great deal of her child's past troubles which she had never heard before.

She was terribly affected by the disclosure.

'God may forgive him,' she exclaimed, with a burst of tears, as she pressed Tim closer to her, and wound her protecting arms more tightly round him. 'God may forgive him, but I never will.'

It was at this juncture that the lady advanced, feeling that she must not delay any longer, and said she had a great favour to beg of Tim and his mother, which she hoped would be granted.

Mrs. Collins declared with warmth that she was ready to do any and everything for the sake of her who had done so much; but when she heard what the request was, her face changed, and she cried out at the idea, while little Tim trembled all over at the thought of being taken to Wild Mike's side.

It was an anxious moment for the lady.

We need not enter into the details of what followed, nor show how she triumphed at last.

There are beings so pure and holy that their very presence purifies all they approach, brings out all that is good in others, and drives all the bad away.

It softens the hardest, roughest natures; shames the unholy, and makes the good more pure.

And Mrs. Collins's nature was not really hard nor rough, and her heart was very full of joy and gratitude.

So, ten minutes after, Tim's forgiving hand is in that of his tormentor, and Tim's mother's pardoning kiss is on Wild Mike's brow.

'As freely,' says a soft, low voice in the silence, 'as freely has God forgiven and forgotten as these have forgiven you.'

CHAPTER X.

WORKING IN THE DARK

CHAPTER X.

THERE is no dissentient voice this time, no disturbing change in the face of the listening boy.

For the earthly forgiveness has brought to his mind, the sense of God's pardoning love. . . .

Tim and his mother retire again, and the lady is left alone by the bedside.

Mike lay with closed eyes, as if waiting to hear more.

Leaving the question of forgiveness, she began now to try and lead his thoughts to the idea of that happy life he was so soon to experience.

She strove to paint the gladness and the glory of the Fair Place to which he was going,

and her glowing eyes and fervent manner, told of her own faith and joy in the things of which she was telling.

'I have thought long and deeply on these things,' she said, softly, 'for I have been down to the Gates of Death myself.'

An incoherent sound which broke from him at her words she interpreted into a desire to know how she had felt.

'I was willing,' she said, in her soft low voice, 'quite willing to go, and am willing still.'

'You thought it was only the poor, and the sick, and wretched, who were willing to die,' she went on, 'but, indeed, it is not so. I have much to leave; dear ones, to whom my going would be such pain that for their sakes, perhaps, I was glad to be restored again; but, as far as I am myself concerned, I am ready to go when God calls me.'

There was no doubting the sincerity of her

words, the truth of the feelings to which she was giving expression.

Her serene countenance confirmed them; the rapt look of her eyes echoed them, and seemed to say: 'I am ready.'

She had gauged all life's happiness and all life's pleasures, drunk deeply of a cup of joy filled to the brim and running over, experienced *all* that this world has to give; and, bright and dear as it all was, she was conscious that she wanted something more.

'Earthly happiness is a husk; it stays the 'hunger of the soul without satisfying it. . . . 'It is the grandeur of the soul which makes it 'insatiable in its desires, with an infinite void 'which cannot be filled by the world. . . . . 'Man's destiny is not to be *dis*satisfied, but to 'be for ever *un*satisfied.'

'Far out of sight, while sorrows still enfold us,
Lies the Fair Country where our hearts abide;
And of its bliss is nought more wondrous told us
Than those few words, "I shall be satisfied."'

'I was not afraid,' she said, catching, as she thought, some enquiring expression to that effect in his eyes. 'No, I was not afraid, because I knew I should not be alone. And you will not be alone either. The Eternal God will be your refuge, and underneath will be the everlasting arms. The loneliness of death is gone for ever, for Christ hath trodden its path before us, and he will lead us through. "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." That was what I kept saying to myself over and over again.'

He was listening intently, and seemed to be trying to say the words himself.

Seeing this she repeated them several times, and then waited anxiously to hear what he would say.

Something, surely, of joy and satisfaction would come from his whitelips now!

But no.

He gave no further sign of consciousness of her presence, nor said what she longed to hear.

The visitors' hour was over, and she left the hospital for that day; but the next morning found her again at his side.

Weaker he was, and less able to listen; but his look told her she was welcome.

It went on like this day after day.

Little could she discover how far her words reached and touched him, and it was with some disappointment that she realised that she should never know what he was feeling.

Stories she had so often read and heard of, of children's happy death-beds, of their dying speeches, their simple words of love and trust in Jesus.

But nothing of all this from him.

Only the expression in his Irish eyes told her he was glad to see her come, and sorry to see her go.

Still she persevered, working on in the dark, day after day.

The sense of forgiveness had, she hoped, come upon him; for the rest she must wait and pray.

CHAPTER XI.

AT LAST

CHAPTER XI.

And so at last the day came when she stood by his side for the last time.

Faint he was and dying, with no voice to speak.

It was but soft whispering on her part; and on his, no sign, no word.

The daylight slowly faded, and the hour of departure came.

Fain would she have lingered, for she longed to catch some indication that her work had not been in vain; she yearned for a sign or token that her prayers for his peace had been heard.

She bowed her head and prayed that a sign

might yet be vouchsafed her, and, gazing upon him, waited for an answer.

But mute and motionless still he remained, and it seemed it was not to be.

As Christ once said to the Scribes and Pharisees so now he seemed to say to her: 'There shall no sign be given you.'

Her heart failed her for a moment; but it was only for a moment.

High soon rose her faith above the wish for outward evidence, the desire for visible proof.

'I am content,' she murmured.

Content to work in the dark and to leave the issues to Him; content to sow in tears, and not bear the sheaves of rejoicing; content to toil in His vineyard, and not see the fruit of those labours.

Slowly she rose and left him, and with lingering footsteps gained the door.

But, as soon as the dying boy found she was no longer near him, he raised himself with all

the little strength that he could muster, to look his last upon her as she receded from his view. Voice he had none with which to stay her footsteps, with which to pray her to let him see her face once more.

Yet, ere she passed out, she was moved, she knew not wherefore, to take one last look at the bed whereon he lay.

And, standing in the doorway, with her white garments fluttering in the light summer breeze which blew in from behind her, she turned—to find his eyes, o'er which the film of death was slowly gathering, fixed upon her; and in their look the sign was given.

In their depths was the token that her prayers had been heard.

The tears rushed into her eyes as she met his rapt and adoring gaze.

For it told her that the peace she had so prayed for, for him, had come down upon his soul at last.

For nothing else could have brought into his eyes that sweet and beautiful expression.

They told her, too, of the love and gratitude with which he was moved towards herself.

They glowed and deepened as they rested on her, as hers met and returned their gaze.

She hastily repressed her tears, lest the sight of them should mar the calm and peace of the boy's dying hour.

For a few minutes she bent upon him a look full of joy and tenderness; and then, with a hopeful smile, and a parting wave of the hand which seemed to seek to direct his looks upwards rather than upon herself, she passed away from his sight—to meet him no more, till, standing by him one Day face-to-face with God, she shall hear her Saviour say: 'He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.'

. . . . . .

And what shall we say of the boy?

How shall we speculate on the feelings with which he was regarding her, who had brought him the message of mercy, and opened to him the Gates of Heaven!

Dreamily, perhaps, may have returned for a moment the memory of the terror which had beset him when he had first heard that he must die.

Back may have come the recollection of the sense of hopeless iniquity, the dread and the shrinking fear.

And there may have dawned on his mind the joyous conviction that he does not fear death now!

That there lurks in his breast no loathing, no shrinking, no dread of the Unknown Land.

And she, who first, by her beauty and goodness, gave him faith in that Better World; she now has shown him the way to it, and made him willing, even glad, to go!

It must have been some such thoughts as these which, causing a flood of love and thankfulness to rush over him, brought that look of adoration to his eye.

When she had quite disappeared, and his straining eyes could no longer discern the last flutter of her dress, he fell back upon his pillow, and turned his face to the wall. . . . . .

And when the hospital awoke to life next morning one little bed was empty; for the angels had come in the darkness and carried Wild Mike away.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR HER SAKE

CHAPTER XII.

It was on a cold winter's day that I first introduced little Tim to my readers; and it will be on a lovely summer's evening that we shall take our leave of him.

From beneath the portals of Victoria Hospital, some time after the events recorded in the last chapter, two figures came out hand-in-hand.

They are those of Tim and his mother; for he is quite recovered, and has this day received his discharge.

To brighter days and a happier home he and his mother are returning. For she has, through the instrumentality of Tim's beautiful

lady found other lodgings, and they will be troubled by rough neighbours no more.

The winter, with its attendant hardships, is a thing of the past, and has been succeeded by cloudless skies and brilliant summer sunshine.

The squares are weighed down with lilacs and laburnums, and the parks are gay with flowers.

The world looks bright and happy; and Tim, with the flush of restored health upon his face, looks bright and happy too.

And yet it is not with unmixed joy that he turns his back upon the hospital, for he has been very happy there, and made many kind friends.

Again and again his head is turned to the door where a group is seen standing; where handkerchiefs are fluttering, and hands are waving adieu.

He kisses his hand repeatedly in recogni-

tion of these farewell salutations; and as he turns the corner, and the hospital is lost to sight, he leaves go of his mother's hand, and runs back for a minute to give one parting look.

After that he gives himself up to the pleasure of finding himself well and happy and in the world again.

Everything seems new and delightful, after his many months of confinement.

The streets, the people, the shops, the carts, the carriages, are each and all objects of delight to him; but when they come in sight of the park, with its green trees and its moving throng, his joy knows no bounds.

He begs his mother to take one little turn there before going home; and as they bend their steps thither she talks to him of all they will do together now. How she will be coming home in the daylight, just as he comes home from school; and how they will wander forth

together in the cool, sweet evenings; and how happy they will be.

They enter the park by the Albert Memorial, and lean against the railings, watching all the carriages go by.

The park is one blaze of beauty; the trees wear their freshest green.

Away, behind the monument, the avenues where the dead boy wandered in the dark night are crowded with happy children, and the blossoms are thick on the trees, against which, in the darkness, he stumbled and fell.

Tim is almost confused with the brightness, the crowds, and the summer sunshine.

There is a garden-party in the neighbourhood, and all the carriages are on their way to it.

Prancing horses, glittering harness, lovely ladies, pretty children, keep up a sort of moving panorama before him, and he stands by his mother's side entranced, too much taken up with what he sees to speak a word.

But that mother's face is overcast.

She had been very silent ever since they stood there, for the sight of the rich in their lavish luxury, their apparent light-heartedness and freedom from care, always raised a peculiar feeling in her breast; and bitter thoughts, for some time dormant, are awaking there once more.

She was gazing gloomily at the glittering throng, when a carriage suddenly came by, at the sight of which her whole face changed in an instant. The gloomy look fled away, and gave place to one of loving admiration. Simultaneously a cry of delight burst from little Tim. And yet the carriage at which Mrs. Collins was gazing so kindly, and with eyes of such grateful tenderness, suggested the idea of luxury quite as much as did any which had preceded it, and the lovely lady who sat in it was as beautifully dressed and looked quite as light-hearted as any who had gone before.

But, attracted by Tim's glad cry, the lady had turned her head in his direction, and had revealed to the poor woman the face which had bent over her as she lay in the hospital, the face of the lady who had saved her boy.

It lighted up with pleasure at the sight of the two standing by the railing; the lady leaned eagerly forward, and repeatedly kissed her hand.

It was all over in a minute, and the carriage out of sight; but it had been as the rustling of angel's wings to that poor rebelling woman.

'Tim,' she said, abruptly, 'do you mind my telling you that the rich were a selfish lot, and that grand ladies only cared for themselves?'

'Yes, mother,' answered Tim.

'Well; I shan't never say it again,' she resumed, shortly, 'that's all.'

No! never again. She knows now what *one* can be, and all will for the future be loved and believed in for her sake.

On came more prancing horses, more glitter-

ing harness, more luxurious carriages, more beautifully dressed ladies.

But Tim's mother no longer gazes upon the dazzling panorama with an unfriendly eye ; no longer views the occupants of the carriages in the same light.

Henceforward she will credit each and all, however much surrounded by the outward trappings of wealth and luxury, with the womanly heart, the tender feelings, the charity, pity, and unselfishness of Tim's 'beautiful lady.'

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION.

And now I would remind my readers that, though my little heroes and the events of their lives belong to the region of fiction, the Victoria Hospital for Sick Children is a fact.

And if any have been touched by this story I would pray them, while the impression is still fresh, to let feeling pass into action, and to bestow some portion of their share of this world's good where it is so much needed.

For there are still weak Tims waiting to be tended, and Wild Mikes waiting to be taught.

Still in the homes of the poor is the cry heard that their children are perishing before

their eyes; that there is no hope for them except by admission into the hospital; and that every bed is full.

Still rises the plaint that by the time there is a chance of a vacancy the children will be beyond the reach of human help.

How can the mothers of these suffering children believe in our Christian charity; or in the brotherly love which we profess to have one for the other?

How can the sight of our children in luxury, in sharp contrast to the bitter want of their own, breed anything in their hearts but a contempt for our selfishness, and a feeling of envy and dislike?

Daily our own well-cared-for and tenderly-nurtured little ones are before their eyes. They meet them at every turn, riding or driving in the parks or in the streets, surrounded by careful attendants, and by every luxury that love and wealth can bestow; and

from the sight, perhaps, these poor mothers return to the dying child at home—dying from sheer want of the care they have not time to bestow, the skilful nursing they have not sufficient knowledge to give, the necessaries they have no means to procure.

And they know all the while that we could save these poor children of theirs, without depriving our own of one of the advantages which they enjoy.

They know that within a stone's-throw of them, perhaps, is a hospital where their little ones might be tended and restored to them, if only its resources were not so limited.

They read in the Bible that there is a faith which works by love.

They read that God is a God of mercy and that He puts it into the hearts of his servants to be merciful too.

From every pulpit in London is proclaimed that those who profess to be His followers are

filled with the Spirit, and that the fruits of the Spirit are love and kindness.

But the wail of their sick and suffering children is sounding in their ears all day long, and contradicts these assertions.

'Do ye hear the children weeping, and disproving
Oh, my brothers, what ye preach ?
For God's possible is taught by this world's loving,
And the " mothers " doubt of each.'

THE END.

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